Maine Farm Safety Program

Bulletin #2330

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Care of Respirators

When cared for and cleaned properly, respirators should work for years without problems. Proper maintenance and testing are a must.

◆ Inspection

Before each use, make sure you have the right respirator for the job, and inspect it for wear and damage.

1. Check for worn or frayed straps.
2. Look for wear or damage on the seal of the facepiece.
3. Be sure all the screws are tight.
4. Check rubber and plastic parts for flexibility.
5. Valves should be clean and seated perfectly.
6. Be sure filters and cartridges are the right kind for the atmosphere in which you will be working. Remember the color code for cartridges and filters is only a guide. Always read the label to be sure you have the right kinds of elements. If a combination of elements is required, be sure you have the right combination on each side of the respirator.
7. If it is a full-face respirator, the face shield should be clear and in good condition.
8. For airline and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) respirators, check the air supply and warning alarm.

Care of Respirators

- **Make sure it is in good working order and the face seal seats properly.**
- **Clean and dry all parts of the respirator regularly.**

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◆ Initial Use of Respirators

The first time you ever use a respirator, try it out in a nonhazardous atmosphere to get accustomed to how it feels. You may need to adjust to some of the following problems:

1. Normal body movements may be more awkward than usual. Some respirators are bulky and heavy.

2. A full-face respirator, or one that covers your entire head, will affect your vision and hearing.

3. Respirators that are not equipped with a speech transmission device or a microphone may reduce the clarity and loudness of your voice.

4. Breathing is likely to require more effort than normal.

◆ Cleaning and Sanitizing Respirators

If you are responsible for cleaning your own respirator, remove and clean filters, cartridges, valve assemblies and any other detachable parts. As you clean and dry each part of the respirator, inspect if carefully to be sure it is in good condition. Check for:

1. Cracks in the face shield.

2. Worn straps, hoses, nose clips.

3. Wear or damage to the face piece seal.

4. Condition of filters, cartridges or canisters.

5. Worn or damaged screw threads.

6. Poor seating of exhalation and inhalation valve disks.

7. Damage to speaking diaphragm, if there is one.

Make sure flexible parts are still flexible, and check the stretch of elastic bands. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting the respirator. Generally, a mild detergent and a soft brush are used for cleaning. Rinse the respirator thoroughly in clean, warm water. Rinsing is extremely important because a residue of the cleaning agent can damage the respirator and irritate skin. Be sure all parts are thoroughly dry before putting the respirator back together again. Use a soft, lint-free cloth to absorb most of the water and a fan to speed up the drying process.

◆ Recognizing an Emergency

If your respirator has an indicator or alarm, be sure it is operating properly. In addition, be alert for the following danger signals. If any of them occur, get to fresh air immediately.

1. Breathing becomes more difficult. Your filter or cartridge may be clogged.

2. You detect any odor, taste or irritation that might indicate the contaminant is getting inside your respirator.

3. The respirator becomes severely uncomfortable.

4. You experience symptoms of illness, such as dizziness, nausea, weakness, coughing or shortness of breath.

Leave the area immediately if any of these problems develop. Check the respirator for damage, and make sure the filters and cartridges are not clogged or not filtering properly.

◆ Storage

When storing a respirator, even overnight, first flex the rubber parts to make sure they are not twisted or bent. Then seal the respirator in a plastic bag and store it where it will be protected. Protect the respirator from dust, sunlight, extreme heat and cold, moisture, damaging chemicals and physical damage.

As you clean and dry each part of the respirator, inspect if carefully to be sure it is in good condition.

This Maine Farm Safety Fact Sheet is part of an educational fact sheet series produced by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. For more information on farm safety, contact your county Extension office.

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